

Whereas AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors funds have been invested in nonprofit, community, educational, and faith-based groups, and those funds leverage hundreds of millions of dollars in outside funding and in-kind support each year;

Whereas AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers have provided millions of hours of service nationwide, helping—

(1) to improve the lives of the most vulnerable people of the United States;

(2) to protect the environment and restore public lands;

(3) to contribute to public safety;

(4) to respond to natural disasters;

(5) to address food insecurity and public health;

(6) to strengthen the educational system of the United States; and

(7) to expand economic opportunity;

Whereas AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers recruit and manage millions of community volunteers, demonstrating the value of AmeriCorps as a powerful force for encouraging people to become involved in volunteering and community service;

Whereas, for more than 5 decades, AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in the RSVP, Foster Grandparent, and Senior Companion programs have played an important role in strengthening communities by sharing their experience, knowledge, and accomplishments with the individuals they serve;

Whereas, since 1994, more than 1,250,000 AmeriCorps members have taken the AmeriCorps pledge to “get things done for America” through the AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps NCCC programs;

Whereas AmeriCorps members nationwide, in return for the service of those members, have earned more than \$4,400,000,000 to use to further their own educational advancement at colleges and universities across the United States and to pay back student loans;

Whereas AmeriCorps is a proven pathway to employment, providing members with valuable career skills, experience, and contacts to prepare them for the 21st century workforce and support economic competitiveness in the United States;

Whereas, in 2009, Congress passed the bipartisan Serve America Act (Public Law 111-13; 123 Stat. 1460), which authorized the expansion of national service, expanded opportunities to serve, increased efficiency and accountability, and strengthened the capacity of organizations and communities to solve problems;

Whereas national service programs have engaged millions of people in the United States in results-driven service in the most vulnerable communities of the United States, providing hope and help to individuals with economic and social needs;

Whereas national service and volunteerism demonstrate the best of the spirit of the United States, with people solving problems by working together to find community solutions; and

Whereas AmeriCorps Week, observed in 2023 from March 12 through March 18, is an appropriate time for the people of the United States—

(1) to salute current and former AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers for their positive impact on generations of Americans;

(2) to thank the grantees, State service commissions, and community partners of AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors for making the programs possible; and

(3) to encourage more people in the United States to become involved in service and volunteering; Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) encourages the people of the United States to join in a national effort—

(A) to salute AmeriCorps members and alumni and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers; and

(B) to raise awareness about the importance of national and community service;

(2) acknowledges the significant accomplishments of the members, volunteers, alumni, and community partners of AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors;

(3) recognizes the important contributions made by AmeriCorps members and alumni and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers to the lives of the people of the United States; and

(4) encourages individuals of all ages to consider opportunities to serve in AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors.

SENATE RESOLUTION 137—HONORING THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE COAST GUARD OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM ON OMBUDSMAN APPRECIATION DAY

Ms. CANTWELL (for herself, Mr. CRUZ, Ms. BALDWIN, and Mr. SULLIVAN) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 137

Whereas the Coast Guard Ombudsman program was formally established by Admiral James S. Gracey, the 17th Commandant of the Coast Guard, to provide a link between the Coast Guard command and Coast Guard families through the engagement of spouses of members of the Coast Guard;

Whereas the leadership of Wanda Allen-Yearout for over 36 years helped establish and shape the Coast Guard Ombudsman program into the robust volunteer force it is today;

Whereas Ombudsman Appreciation Day is celebrated on March 26, 2023, to honor Coast Guard ombudsmen for the dedicated service they provide to the mission-ready workforce of the Coast Guard;

Whereas Coast Guard ombudsmen serve as volunteers—

(1) providing information and referral resources; and

(2) acting as advocates for the families of members of the Coast Guard;

Whereas the selfless Coast Guard ombudsmen volunteers are essential to the success of the Coast Guard, supporting families to enable service members and service commands to focus on mission requirements;

Whereas, in 2022, Coast Guard service members were helping the public and carrying out missions, and ombudsmen across the Coast Guard were helping by making over 350,000 contacts with, and volunteering more than 13,000 hours to assist, Coast Guard families;

Whereas, recognizing that military service involves sacrifices and difficulties with separation from family, frequent moves, new schools, and long distances from loved ones, Coast Guard ombudsmen respond to ensure military families are not alone by providing vital information to facilitate the transitions of those families to new assignments and to overcome family challenges;

Whereas Coast Guard ombudsmen were vital to supporting family members after the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, the most extensive organizational transformation of the Coast Guard since World War II;

Whereas, as the Coast Guard responded to and rescued displaced people during Hurricane Katrina, Coast Guard ombudsmen, often consisting of spouses of Coast Guard rescuers and hurricane evacuees—

(1) tracked and accounted for Coast Guard families;

(2) rendered assistance; and

(3) communicated vital evacuation information;

Whereas, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Coast Guard ombudsmen recognized challenges and ensured the operational readiness of the Coast Guard was maintained by providing direct support to Coast Guard families; and

Whereas, by volunteering on the home front, being available for Coast Guard families, and helping Coast Guard families obtain the resources and information necessary for success, Coast Guard ombudsmen help ensure that members of the Coast Guard and their families remain “Always Ready” to meet the needs of the United States: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) celebrates Ombudsman Appreciation Day and Coast Guard ombudsmen on March 26, 2023;

(2) is grateful to the women and men who volunteer their time as Coast Guard ombudsmen to assist the families of members of the Coast Guard; and

(3) congratulates the volunteers of the Coast Guard Ombudsman program on 37 years of service.

SENATE RESOLUTION 138—HIGHLIGHTING THE RISKS THAT ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS FACE AROUND THE WORLD AND COMMENDING THEIR ROLE IN DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS, COMBATING CLIMATE CHAOS, AND SUPPORTING A CLEAN, HEALTHY, AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. MERKLEY (for himself, Mr. KAINE, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. PADILLA, and Mr. CARDIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 138

Whereas, around the world, environmental defenders—individuals exercising their human rights to try to peacefully protect an area or the natural resources of such area from negative environmental impact by an ongoing or proposed activity—face persecution from government, private sector, and criminal actors, including restrictions on free speech and assembly, criminalization, civil lawsuits, surveillance, harassment, verbal, cyber, and physical intimidation, sexual assault, and targeted murder;

Whereas at least 1,733 environmental defenders have been reported killed since 2012, with at least 200 killed in 2021;

Whereas at least 1,179 environmental defenders have been reported killed in Latin America and the Caribbean since 2012, making it the region with the highest number of environmental defender deaths and persecution overall, exemplified by the cases of—

(1) Homero Gómez González, who was forcibly disappeared and found dead in Mexico with reported signs of torture after fighting to protect the wintering grounds of the monarch butterfly from illegal logging;

(2) Bruno Pereira, an advocate for the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil’s Amazon, who received threats and was murdered for standing up to illegal logging, mining, and drug trafficking;

(3) Berta Cáceres, a Lenca Indigenous woman, whose murder was ordered by the Honduran company, Desarrollos Energéticos SA, for organizing protests that led to the cancellation of the proposed Agua Zarca Dam; and

(4) the Q'eqchi Mayan Indigenous community, which faces defamation, violent evictions, harassment, and assault by the Guatemalan National Civil Police Force for peacefully protesting the operations of the Fenix mine and growth of palm plantations on their territory;

Whereas at least 427 environmental defenders have been reported killed in Asia since 2012, and governments in the region have also targeted environmental defenders in other manners, including—

(1) the Government of Vietnam, which has sought to silence environmental activist Dang Dinh Bach through imprisonment;

(2) the Government of the Philippines, which has enacted red-tagging campaigns to turn public sentiment against organizations like the Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment; and

(3) the Government of the People's Republic of China, which has falsely charged environmental activists Li Genshan, Zhang Baoqi, and Niu Haibo for illegally hunting or killing wildlife;

Whereas the Government of Egypt hosted the 27th Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, while government security forces held environmental activists Ahmed Amasha and Seif Fateen in extended, arbitrary pretrial detention for joining a terrorist group after forcibly disappearing and torturing them for exercising their rights to free expression;

Whereas Ali Ulvi Büyüknöhtüçü and Aysin Büyüknöhtüçü of Türkiye won lawsuits against mining companies who illegally operated pollution-creating quarries, but were shot and killed by gunmen with alleged ties to those companies;

Whereas fossil fuel companies, mining operations, agribusiness plantations, and mega dams are major causes of environmental destruction and are also being used to drive communities from their homes and their lands;

Whereas rampant corruption and weak rule of law enables those targeting environmental defenders to operate with impunity; and

Whereas civil society is, and should be, a powerful voice for individuals experiencing and at risk from the effects of worsening climate chaos, including Indigenous Peoples whose ancestral rights, lives, traditional lands, and cultural practices are disproportionately threatened by climate chaos: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) commends and expresses solidarity with environmental defenders as crucial members of civil society who defend both human rights and the environment and play a crucial role in tackling climate chaos;

(2) strongly condemns the targeting, harassment, and unlawful detention of any individual or group for exercising their rights of free association and expression, including advocacy on environmental matters, reporting and seeking information on environmental violations and abuses, or cooperation with local, regional, national, or international mechanisms;

(3) welcomes the relevant principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, done at Rio de Janeiro 1992, and United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/40/11 (2019) as global advancements in recognizing the crucial role that environmental defenders play as human rights defenders;

(4) welcomes the relevant principles of United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/76/300 (2022) as advancing the global conversation towards the importance of a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as an international human right;

(5) welcomes the United States Government's assertion during its time as Summit Chair of the Ninth Summit of the Americas that environmental defenders should not be denied access to basic environmental information, public participation in proposed projects that would affect their communities, or justice as they seek legal redress from government authorities;

(6) urges the United States Government to consult and cooperate in good faith with Indigenous Peoples who are concerned with the environment in order to obtain the free, prior, and informed consent of such Indigenous Peoples, without coercion, prior to the approval of any project affecting the lands, territories, religious practices, or other natural and cultural resources of such Indigenous Peoples;

(7) welcomes the work of the Department of State-led Interagency Working Group, which invites more than 1000 officials across more than 20 Federal agencies, to reduce violence against environmental defenders and to properly monitor and address the expanding nature and cases of persecution against environmental defenders;

(8) calls for the President to prioritize the global leadership of the United States in tackling reprisals against environmental defenders through a whole-of-government approach in collaboration with foreign governments, multilateral organizations, and civil society organizations;

(9) urges the Department of State to integrate concerns about environmental defenders in all appropriate engagements to exert diplomatic pressure and speak out publicly in countries where environmental defenders are at risk;

(10) requests that the Department of State establish a position focused on environmental defenders within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor;

(11) requests that the United States Agency for International Development prioritize the finalization of an independent accountability mechanism and the establishment of a position to integrate protection of environmental defenders across broader environmental, economic growth, and human rights and democracy programming in order to better achieve its 2022-2030 Climate Strategy, which seeks to promote a safe and secure political environment at all levels of governance for Indigenous Peoples, human rights and environmental defenders, and local communities to participate in climate actions and the protection of civil society and environmental defenders, including land and resource rights for effective climate outcomes;

(12) encourages the United States International Development Finance Corporation to improve transparency through its independent accountability mechanism, conduct due diligence with partners, and engage in local consultation processes based on free, prior, and informed consent;

(13) encourages the United States Government to use its voice and vote within international financial institutions to ensure that United States taxpayer dollars do not support individuals, foreign governments, or private sector entities that adversely affect the environment or target or expose to harm persons who speak out against such individuals and entities;

(14) encourages the United States to use its leadership in the United Nations Human Rights Council to ensure that the intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights that was adopted by United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/26/9 (2014), creates an internationally legally binding instrument that supports and protects human rights defenders, including environmental defenders;

(15) calls for responsible conduct of United States companies, financial institutions, and investors in relation to the freedoms and rights of Indigenous communities and other environmental defenders, particularly in the agribusiness, fossil fuel, mining, and hydroelectricity sectors; and

(16) calls for the United States to use its influence as a member of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to push for the Conference of Parties to only take place in countries that have and actively encourage a thriving civil society and have taken concrete actions to tackle climate chaos, which stands in contrast to the selection of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates who were selected as hosts in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 57. Mr. KENNEDY submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 870, to amend the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 to authorize appropriations for the United States Fire Administration and firefighter assistance grant programs; which was ordered to lie on the table.

TEXT OF AMENDMENTS

SA 57. Mr. KENNEDY submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 870, to amend the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 to authorize appropriations for the United States Fire Administration and firefighter assistance grant programs; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. __. COLLATERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR DISASTER LOANS.

Section 7(d)(6) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(d)(6)) is amended in the third proviso—

(1) by striking “\$14,000” and inserting “\$25,000”; and

(2) by striking “major disaster” and inserting “disaster”.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I have nine requests for committees to meet during today's session of the Senate. They have the approval of the Majority and Minority Leaders.

Pursuant to rule XXVI, paragraph 5(a), of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the following committees are authorized to meet during today's session of the Senate:

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 29, 2023, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

The Committee on Environment and Public Works is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 29, 2023, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.